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Budget Committee U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the National Education Association's (NEA) 2.7 million members, we would like to express our views on the FY 2005 Congressional Budget Resolution.

NEA believes that the Budget Resolution should reflect our nation's priorities, and that improving the education of our nation's children should and must be a priority. America's public schools are struggling to provide quality services to increased numbers of disadvantaged students and students with special needs, while also implementing accountability and testing mandates. At the same time, state budget crises are forcing dramatic cuts in state education funding. Meaningful increases to programs such as Title I and IDEA are critical to closing achievement gaps, maximizing student achievement, and helping all students excel. Increases are also needed for higher education programs such as Pell Grants, which help ensure access to postsecondary education – so critical in today's global economy.

Given these urgent needs, NEA would strongly oppose any Congressional Budget Resolution that provided funding at or less than the levels proposed by the Administration for domestic discretionary programs. NEA is also very concerned about the impact of proposals to extend tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy. Increased cost estimates indicate that such tax extenders would dramatically restrict funds available for education and other domestic priorities.

NEA's specific budget priorities include:

- Title I: Provide for funding at the authorized level of \$20.5 billion. Almost 27,000 schools did not make adequate yearly progress under the achievement and accountability provisions of No Child Left Behind, with over 7,000 already designated as "needing improvement". These schools must show improvement quickly, but must do so under what are in many cases severe budget cutbacks. Most activities that schools will put in place to improve student achievement, such as after school or summer school programs, enhanced and expanded professional development for teachers, or smaller class sizes, all require additional resources.
- IDEA: Provide mandatory annual increases in accordance with the Bass-Ferguson-Simmons-Bradley proposal (H.R. 3082), to bridge the current funding gap, and reach full funding. Though strides have been made to increase funding for IDEA, funding levels remain far from the promised 40 percent of the costs of providing services to students. Because of the limited funding available, schools are often unable to provide the full spectrum of critical special education services mandated under IDEA. The lack of sufficient funding to meet the needs of students with disabilities

also places considerable strain on the entire school budget, as administrators are forced to increase tax revenue or cut other critical programs to provide mandated IDEA services.

- Pell Grants: Support an increase of at least \$500 in the Pell Grant maximum, bringing the maximum to \$4,550. Access to postsecondary education opportunities allows individuals to succeed in jobs with career potential and upward mobility. Census data consistently show that those with higher educational attainment have higher median earnings. Expanding postsecondary education opportunities also helps ensure the well-educated workforce our nation needs to compete in the 21st century. As public universities and community colleges, which have long been seen as the "affordable" option, have to raise their tuition to make up for severe state budget cutbacks, the ability for low-income individuals to pay for college becomes an even greater challenge.
- Restore Program Eliminations: Provide \$1.4 billion to restore funding for the 38 education programs slated for elimination by the Administration. Eliminating these programs, including programs to reduce dropout rates and provide for more individualized attention to high school students (Smaller Learning Communities and School Counselors), seems in direct contradiction to the laudable goal of increasing graduation rates inherent in the Administration's focus on literacy.
- Opposition to Vouchers: Reject any diversion of taxpayer funds to private schools.

In addition, NEA opposes any procedural changes that would significantly reduce the congressional role in determining federal spending. Specifically, we oppose any proposals to strip Congress' power of the purse by implementing the line item veto, sequestration, and permanent "continuing resolution" authority.

We thank you for your consideration of our views and we look forward to working with you to craft a budget that truly meets the needs of America's families and children.

Sincerely,

Diane Shust

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